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 HD **What debt do rich countries owe the ones that'll get shafted by the climate crisis? We all know there will be a cost to a catastrophically warmed planet, and it's unfair to expect our young people to fix it**
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Berlin

Even if you didn't know that the Fridays for Future climate strike was powered by students, the signs dotting the huge crowd at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate would have given it away. "Dumbledore wouldn't let this happen," one of them read. A boy climbed a lamppost beside his friend, holding a sign against the grey sky: "So bad even the introverts are here."

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Nearby, Gina Geers and Saskia Schramm stood under their hand-lettered sign, which said in German, "Save the Earth. It's the only planet with Nutella." The 17-year-olds had skipped their Grade 11 classes, like many students in Berlin and around the world, to protest political inaction over climate change. "I think the government has to recognize how big this problem is," Ms. Geers said. "It has to finally do something."

Parents carried toddlers, many of them wearing sensible ear protection, as just a few blocks away German Chancellor Angela Merkel and her coalition "climate cabinet" were at the end of a [marathon haggling session](#) over their new green platform. Germans are weary of the [slow progress](#) on Energiewende, or energy transition. The country won't meet its [emissions target](#) for 2020 (cutting emissions to 40 per cent below 1990 levels.)

The country faces "a Herculean task," Ms. Merkel [said](#) at last week's Frankfurt auto show, which was [disrupted by protesters](#). The details of the new green deal were not yet public as I wrote this but were reported to include an emissions-trading policy for building and transportation industries, subsidies for electric cars, new taxes on gasoline and increasing reliance on wind and solar power.

Many in this crowd are too young to vote, so it's up to those who can – and who bear the burden of this mess – to answer a pressing question: In a time of climate crisis, what do rich countries such as Germany and Canada owe to poor ones?

Decades ago, racial segregation in South Africa was considered a blight so vile that its government was rightly censured by people around the world. Climate apartheid, as the United Nations calls the disparity between the experiences of rich countries and poor ones, is equally real but more intangible, at least for those who live in the West. It will take more of an effort to solve. It can't be fixed by boycotting a particular wine.

Climate apartheid [.according](#) to a UN report released in June, is “a scenario where the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger and conflict while the rest of the world is left to suffer.” Even under the most optimistic and unlikely projections – with global warming held to 1.5 degrees – 130 million people may be forced into poverty. “While people in poverty are responsible for just a fraction of global emissions, they will bear the brunt of climate change, and have the least capacity to protect themselves.”

This isn't some dystopian future, either. It's today. When the U.S. media obsessed over whether Donald Trump had extended a [weather map's trajectory with a Sharpie](#) , Hurricane Dorian was bearing down on the Bahamas. Dozens of people were killed – though that figure is likely to rise, since more [than 1,000 are unaccounted for](#) . The hardest-hit areas were the shanty towns of [poor Haitian immigrants](#) who service the tourism industry.

The Bahamas contributes just .01 per cent to global emissions but bears the brunt of climate change due to increasing storm intensity and rising sea levels, [as reported](#) by InsideClimate News. Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria two years ago, and its inhabitants are still waiting for clean water and [long-promised federal assistance](#) .

People with gas and hotel money can pick up and leave if a hurricane is coming. Those without are left to weather the storm, often because they have sick or elderly relatives in their care. As the [UN report](#) notes, those on the margins are not just more vulnerable to crop failure and floods, but also have less access to health care and safety nets to help them recover.

The movement to recognize this disparity is called environmental justice, and [it's spreading](#) – but not nearly fast enough. In the United States, progress is actually being rolled back, as the Trump administration opens the door to [water polluters](#) and [cuts restrictions to methane emissions](#) and [tells California](#) that cars should actually belch more noxious gases than they already do. But wait – there's more! The administration has cut [85 environmental protections](#) , by The New York Times' count.

It would be nice if Canadians could feel smug on this front. If, for example, climate change was anywhere near the forefront of the discussion during this godforsaken federal election. If we were going to meet our emissions targets ([we're not](#)) and if one of the politicians on stage in the official debates wasn't in the business of [mocking climate change](#) .

Canadians – like Germans – actually are concerned. They do want action. It's one of their Top 3 [election concerns](#) , even if they aren't actually willing to pay the price necessary to change ([according to a CBC poll](#) , only a quarter of Canadians surveyed said they'd be willing to pay the cost of an annual Netflix subscription to help counter the effects of climate change). It made me think of German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz [saying](#) . “You can't have climate action at zero cost.” I wonder if German voters will agree?

But we all know there will be a cost, for everyone, even if it's disproportionately borne by those who've already been shafted by the lottery of birth. A catastrophically warmed planet will result in political upheaval, financial shocks, turmoil that is beyond our ken.

On Friday, we all went home from the Brandenburg Gate to homes where the water and heating reliably worked. But the students in Berlin are connected to the rest of the world in a way that the young people of my generation could only imagine. They game with kids in Mumbai, they share manga with kids in Brisbane. They'll check their phones and see their fellow climate strikers in Lagos and Santiago and Halifax. Maybe they see the world in the way we failed to – as a whole. But it's unfair to expect them to fix it.

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